SF Chronicle

Does the Sandman Shun the White House?

By Robert C. Toth
Los Angeles Times

Washington

A White House doctor last month asked the National Institutes of Health for literature on insomnia, and Nixon watchers immediately suspected that the stress of Watergate and impeachment moves was taking its toll on the President.

Presidential physician Chester L. Ward, who was sent a copy of "Insomnia: The Guide for Troubled Sleepers" and other material, said his request was spurred by an argument among Secret Service men on the effects of night shifts on efficiency.

"Not everything that occurs in the White House medical unit directly relates to the President's health," Dr. Ward said. He and the chief White House physician, Dr. Walter R. Tkach, denied that Mr. Nixon is suffering, or ever has suffered, from insomnia.

However, Julie Nixon Eisenhower suggested that Mr. Nixon was having trouble sleeping last fall. In an interview in November with the Associated Press, she spoke of the President often sitting alone playing the piano softly and added: "Sometimes all alone at night, you'll hear this music in the hallway."

And of her father's sleep habits, she said: "The pattern has been that maybe he wakes up once during the night and takes notes for an hour or so and goes back to sleep. He doesn't usually sleep through the night."

Tkach, who also attended Mr. Nixon when he was vice president, said he has seen no discernible change in Mr. Nixon. "Everyone is just looking more closely at him these days," he said.

DR. WALTER TKACH
Denial on insomnia

Heightened scrutiny or not, shifts in Mr. Nixon's behavior patterns have been discerned. Most noticeable has been an increased talkativeness.

During his trip a few weeks ago to Xenia, Ohio, one psychiatrist experienced in the behavior of public officials said Mr. Nixon was strikingly voluble during an exchange that appeared on a television newscast.

"It seemed a sign of what we called 'pressure of speech,' a need to speak rather than listen when under stress," he said.

"The President asked one resident who'd lost his house how he felt, and you could see the guy wanted to say he feels pretty bad. But the President kept telling him he would 'come back and stick it out.'"

Vice President Gerald Ford has also recognized a new talkativeness in Mr. Nixon. In a New Republic report, which Ford later said was "exaggerated" but not inaccurate, Ford's views were put this way:

"The hours that he (Ford) has had to spend with the President, mostly listening to Mr. Nixon talk about this and that, have on a few occasions driven the vice president close to distraction. He's brought himself recently to break off their conversations, pleading that he's got to go some place."

(Later, Ford's press aide Paul Miltich said what the vice president meant to convey was that he did not want to "overstay his welcome.")

But Ford left the impression with Osborne that "the President has undergone a change in personality in the past year or so."

Presidential aides insist there is little basis for Ford's views. One official with firsthand knowledge of Ford's visiting time with Mr. Nixon said that all but one session to date has been brief.

An aide said Nixon was a bit short-tempered and edgy last October, November and December — "as we all were" — and sometimes seemed unable or unwilling to focus on business brought by staffers for his attention.

But since the turn of the year, the aide maintains, Mr. Nixon has rebounded. "I'm awed at his mental discipline, his ability to cope with minutia, his patience," the aide said. "I just can't see any personality change at all."

In fact, psychiatrists do not look for personalities to change under stress. Rather, they would expect a shedding of the social niceties, a reversion to basic character, in those under great pressure.

"Don't look at the sweat on his upper lip, or his gesturing, or his not looking people in the eye when he speaks," said the psychiatrist, who is highly knowledgeable about public figures. "He's always been that way.

"Stress usually works like age. A man's character becomes more clearly defined, easier to see. Politicians in these situations tend to lose the geniality and pseudo-warmth they worked to acquire," he explained.

Thus the "new" Nixon volubleness, or disposition not to listen, is seen as the emergence of a basic trait of the Nixon character. So are recent shows of temper in public.

But these are changes in degree rather than kind, for Mr. Nixon has always been reported to have a short fuse.

Tkach, who sees Mr. Nixon regularly, maintains that there has been "no change in the President" in the past year nor any obvious impact on his health.

The White House physician said he does not know if the stress of Watergate produced a weakened resistence to infection in Mr. Nixon that led to his bout with viral pneumonia in July.

"Stress is not measurable," he said. "Some people under stress get sick, others do not."

Similarly, it is "just impossible to guess" whether the combination of continued pressure on Mr. Nixon, plus his increasing age — he is now 61 years old — will cause a greater frequency in minor illnesses in the President, Tkach said.

(Was Tkach asked, or did he volunteer?)

NY TIMES APR 23 [illegible]

Romney Asserts Staff Cleared Acts With Nixon

RICHMOND, April 22 (UPI) —George Romney said today that President Nixon must have known what his 1972 re-election staff was doing at the time of the Watergate break-in.

Mr. Romney, former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under Mr. Nixon, said staff and campaign workers cleared all actions with the President. Mr. Romney, now president of the National Center for Voluntary Action, said, "I don't think they did anything without his approval."